UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

In Reply, Please Refer to File No.

Memphis, Tennessee
April 6, 1968

Re: SANITATION WORKERS STRIKE,
MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE
RACIAL MATTERS

The following is a summary of activities in Memphis, Tennessee, received on April 4 and occurring on late April 3 and on April 4, 1968, as specified hereinafter:

The "Commercial Appeal" newspaper, issue of April 4, 1968, in a story on page 8 reported that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on the night of April 3, 1968, spoke to more than two thousand persons at Mason Temple in connection with the sanitation workers strike at Memphis, Tennessee, which began February 12, 1968. Dr. King emphasized that a scheduled mass march must be held Monday, April 8, 1968, to "re-focus attention on the eight-week-old sanitation workers strike." He said, "If the police dogs and fire hoses in Alabama couldn't stop us, an injunction in Memphis, Tennessee, can't." He stated that the violence which had erupted during the March 28, 1968, mass march led by him caused the tension to focus on the "broken windows." He said "That's what happens when you have a little violence. The press concentrated on the broken windows and not the issues." He stated that the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) lawyers were going into United States District Court on the morning of April 4, 1968, to fight the temporary restraining order issued on April 3, 1968, by United States District Court Judge Bailey Brown against further marches in Memphis, Tennessee. Dr. King again called for economic boycotts against leading Memphis businesses. He said, "We don't need bricks and bottles and Molotov cocktails. We're building an economic base and putting pressure where it hurts."

The paper continued that Dr. King again urged persons to leave work and school to join the April 8, 1968, scheduled march. The paper reported that he was again scheduled to speak on the night of April 4, 1968, also at Mason Temple.

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ENCLOSURE

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The paper also reported that Dr. Ralph Abernathy, Executive Vice President of SCLC, spoke and praised Dr. King, saying that despite Dr. King's honors, he had not yet decided to be President of the United States, adding, "But he is the man who tells the President what to do."

The paper also reported in this story that the last battalion of the Tennessee National Guard had been released from active duty and that the 200 Tennessee Highway Patrol Troopers who had been on duty since March 28, 1968, had also returned home on late April 3, 1968.

Also on April 4, 1968, a first source advised that a strategy meeting was held on the night of April 3 and early morning of April 4, 1968, at the Minimum Salary of the CME Church, next door to Clayborn Temple, which has been the unofficial headquarters of the groups supporting the sanitation strikers, namely the Community on the Move for Equality (COME), a group of Memphis ministers, and the SCLC, and recently the Black Organizing Power (BOP), which, according to its leaders Charles Laverne Cabbage and John Burrell Smith, is affiliated fraternally with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, (SNCC).

The big problem which developed, according to source one, was the fact that Cabbage and his BOP group want to gain importance. They want to give the illusion to the Negro leaders in Memphis that they are the only force which can control militant Negro youths in Memphis and can prevent trouble if necessary and they are emphasizing that if the COME and the SCLC group provide them with sufficient money, with no strings attached, that they will possibly work to maintain a status of nonviolence in Memphis. The other problem discussed was that of organizing parade marshals and making efforts to pimpoint those who might cause trouble in the scheduled April 8, 1968, mass march.

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According to source one, Cabbage kept claiming to have the power to do things but when the ministers and SCLC people present pinned him down, he was vague. At one point, Cabbage's girl friend, also a member of the governing body of BOP, namely Edwina Jeanetta Harrell, said, "All of this talk and nothing accomplished."

Source one advised that another representative of BOP, in addition to Harrell, was Charles Steven Ballard, an Owen college student.

Source one advised that the meeting was chaired by Reverend James Morris Lawson, Jr., pastor of the Centenary Methodist Church, Memphis.

Source one advised that another person present at this meeting was a young, semi-militant Negro male, about 17 years of age, Murray Austin Ervin of 1108 Argyle, President of the Student Body at Northside High School in Memphis, but it could not be definitely determined if he was part of the BOP group. He criticized Martin Luther King, Jr., for only preaching nonviolence in the Beale Street area of Memphis, saying that Beale Street had nothing but a bunch of old men and that if King really wanted to accomplish something, he should go into the housing projects and other fringe Negro ghetto areas and talk with youths in those areas, as those youths generally represented the most militant Negro youths in Memphis.

Source one advised that the group present decided that workshops would begin in Mason Temple on the afternoon of April 4, 1968, preceding the night of April 4, 1968, mass meeting; and that at these workshops SCLC personnel would teach their methods of nonviolent marching and parade marshaling. It was decided that, for example, Reverend Henry Logan Starks, pastor of the St. James AME Church and a member of the COME group, would be a top deputy marshal and it was up to him to obtain 25 ministers who would serve as marshals under his guidance. It was decided that Charles Laverne Cabbage would be a top deputy marshal and that it was up to him to provide 25 of his BOP and related people as marshals, although

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Cabbage indicated that he did not have 25 BOP members but had allies and associates in his movement of a larger number at the various colleges. It was also decided that SCLC would provide marshals of an undetermined number.

Source one stated that Cabbage resented the fact that SCLC was to train the marshals and kept saying, "We don't need outsiders to come into Memphis and tell us what to do."

According to source one, Andrew J. Young of the SCLC staff tried to diplomatically tell Cabbage that SCLC merely wanted to lend the benefit of its vast experience and counsel based on numerous task marches throughout the country.

Source one stated that Cabbage very definitely appeared to be "trying to drop a pigeon on the COME and SCLC group," explaining that this was a form of blackmail on his part where he in effect was saying to them, "Give us money or we can't be responsible for any violence which might happen."

T-NN. One of the leading strike supporters, Cornelia Crenshaw, a Negro political leader in Memphis, stated that she definitely would be opposed to any of the strike support funds raised by COME being diverted to subsidize a special group such as Cabbage's BOP.

Source one stated that also opposing the giving of any money to Cabbage and his group were Dr. Vasco A. Smith, Jr., and wife, Mrs. Maxine Smith, Dr. Smith being the Vice President and Mrs. Smith being the Executive Secretary of the NAACP Chapter in Memphis, Tennessee. They felt that Cabbage merely wanted to get a strong foothold in the Negro movement in Memphis and that it could give the Negro movement a bad image.

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Source one stated that also present was one Ernest Smith, a male Negro, middle age, who stated that he was with some branch of the Methodist Church in Washington, D. C., having to do with race and religion. He seemed to be much impressed with Cabbage and in fact gave Cabbage a calling card, listing his Memphis motel address and asking that Cabbage contact him on April 4, 1968, for a conference.

Source one stated that Bernard Lee, Administrative Aide to Dr. King, stated that Cabbage had also "conned" SCLC out of $167.00, which came out of SCLC headquarters in Atlanta, this money given to Cabbage ostensibly to pay for the motel rooms at the Lorraine Hotel which he, John Smith, Edwina Harrell and others had been occupying since around March 30, 1968. Lee further stated that it appeared that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and his group were unable to get through to Cabbage and his group and to convince them of their philosophy of nonviolence. Lee stated that it appeared that Cabbage wants money now without being able to give any firm commitments. Source one pointed out that Cabbage, Edwina Harrell, and Ballard all used extremely vulgar and foul language in this meeting attended by several prominent Negro ministers and Negro women.

Also source one pointed out that as an example of the utter brazen disrespect shown by Cabbage and his group could be best described by an incident which occurred earlier on April 3, 1968, at the Lorraine Hotel when Cabbage in his room told Edwina Harrell that he wanted her to go and arrange for a conference with Dr. King and he said it in the following manner, "I want you to go down there and tell that Nigger King that I want him to come up here and see me." Source one pointed out that as of the night of April 3, 1968, it had also been determined that James Phillips of the BOP governing body, John Burrell Smith, and Verdell Brooks of the governing body of BOP, along with Don Neely, 531 East McLemore, Memphis, a new follower of the BOP group, were all in the Lorraine Hotel prior to the above-described mass meeting.

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At this meeting also at the Lorraine Hotel, John Burrell Smith claimed that he is giving regularly a portion of his GI educational bill check which he receives by virtue of his attendance at Owen College to the BOP treasury, and James Elmore Phillips, an Owen College student, stated that he had already given over $100 to the BOP treasury. Phillips and Smith argued quite vehemently, talking in a crazy and vague manner, being highly emotional and dramatic, and little that they said made sense.

Source one advised that also on the late evening of April 3, 1968, Bernard Lee of the SCLC staff lamented the fact that the SCLC people, including Dr. King, had consistently met with the BOP group but had concluded that the BOP group is too impatient in that it wants instant action, instant success, and instant accomplishments, coupled with the fact that the BOP group does not trust anyone. Lee stated that despite this the SCLC group would try to help BOP but added, "We won't be blackmailed by them."

Also on the late evening of April 3, 1968, according to source one, Hosea Williams, of the SCLC, told John Burrell Smith and Charles Cabbage that he and Reverend James Orange of the SCLC staff would be willing to continue to talk with them, Williams stating that he and Orange were probably better able emotionally to deal with people like Cabbage. He did not elaborate.

Source one also recalled that on the late night of April 3, 1968, Reverend James Lawson made the statement, "Thank goodness there was a riot in Memphis last week (March 28, 1968) because without it we wouldn't have gotten all the outside help and attention, such as that furnished by SCLC." Lawson added, however, that despite the fact that violence had occurred, he could not personally as a minister of the gospel condone violence.

Source one stated that Lawson made another comment, "We'll try to get along with BOP. We'll just do the best we can." Lawson stated that the Memphis Police Department and law enforcement in general needed to take more preventive measures in dealing with the problem of Negroes in large cities, that it needed better training of its personnel, and

that by the same token, the people preparing for large downtown marches had a duty to train and have more and better parade marshals to keep the marchers in line.

Source one stated that Lawson said that he hoped that King would be able to go into the Negro neighborhoods and talk with the young Negro militants and preach nonviolence to them.

Also according to source one, on the night of April 3, 1968, Reverend Williams Smith of the COME group tried to get over to Cabbage that he needed to talk prevention rather than violence.

Source one pointed out that Cabbage stated that he would never tell COME or SCLC how to prevent violence and Cabbage gave every impression in his ambiguous, vague statements of being a "dreamer," and stated that he has visions of a massive black political movement of an undetermined nature in the United States.

[redacted]rs. Maxine Smith stated that the NAACP would lend its support to the April 8, 1968, march but that she could not get any satisfaction out of talking with Charles Cabbage as he was too militant and too distrustful.

[redacted] Cabbage [redacted] mentioned [redacted] that he and his group would soon be moving from the Lorraine Hotel and that they would leave SCLC responsible for paying the Hotel bill.

Source one added that considerable dissension has arisen between King and his aides and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Union, which is representing the striking workers, in that the Union wants to bring thousands of people to Memphis in the mass march on April 8, 1968, whereas King and his group are worried feeling that if these people come to Memphis they will spend large amounts of money, time and effort and will be less likely to support his Washington Spring Project, scheduled to begin in Washington on April 22,1968.

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[redacted] confidential source who had furnished [redacted] extremely reliable information in the past had reported on April 4, 1968, that the BOP will definitely take part and participate in future strategy meetings involving the SCLC and COME. [redacted] Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., appeared at a noon ministerial meeting at the Centenary Methodist Church on April 3, 1968, to give the reasons for being in Memphis, stating that his purpose in returning to Memphis was to lead a march on April 8, 1968; and he denied that he, personally, as well as the sanitation workers, was responsible in any manner for the racial trouble that was developed during the March 28, 1968, march. King told the ministers that the troublemakers are actually to be pitied for all they have ever known is poverty and the economic war attendant to living in poverty. He explained the "Operation Breadbasket" program and economic boycott program of white businesses which was being spearheaded by one of his assistants, Reverend Jesse Jackson of Chicago, Illinois.

Lieutenant Arkin's source also reported that at the Lorraine Hotel on April 3, 1968, John Burrell Smith and Charles Cabbage, along with other BOP personnel, personally met with Dr. King and his staff; and John Burrell Smith kept saying to King and his group, "What's more important, Memphis or Washington?" In discussing, according to Arkin's source, the temporary injunction issued by Memphis United States District Court Judge Bailey on April 3, 1968, restricting and preventing any marches for a period of ten days, King stated that he would have to consult with his staff before deciding whether or not to march in defiance of the order and that he at first thought United States President Lyndon B. Johnson was responsible for the injunction hoping thereby to set a precedent for preventing his group from engaging in the Washington Spring Project, a massive influx of poverty stricken people to the Nation's Capital beginning on April 22, 1968. Lieutenant Arkin's source further stated that at about 4 p.m., April 3, 1968, King

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met with the BOP group and that among those meeting were Martin Luther King, Jr., John Burrell Smith, Charles Cabbage, and one Oree McKenzie, a young Negro male. Also at the meeting were Edwina Harrell and a young man called Phil. Jesse Jackson, Hosea Williams, and Andrew J. Young all of the SCLC staff were also at the meeting. At this meeting Cabbage asked for immediate money to use by BOP to start a "Liberation School" and a "Black Co-op," at which black culture and black history could be taught and through which Black literature could be sold.

Cabbage indicated that he had a 5-point program which he did not pinpoint and that he needed money. He at first started talking in terms of two million dollars.

[redacted] Martin Luther King, Jr., told Cabbage that he would use his influence in a group of churches recently formed in Detroit and that this new church group had set up a program of giving financial aid to black militant groups. King stated that this church group, not further described, would give money to eight different cities and would channel this through Andrew J. Young of his staff and that Young could handle the mechanics and set up an outline but would have to have a better plan and finalized program from Cabbage before pursuing this further. King told Cabbage that he would have to re-write his plan. Andrew Young stated that he would help write up a plan for BOP.

In the opinion of [redacted] King and his group will give money to BOP in order to keep them in line and to keep them from following a violent pattern, particularly while King and his group are in Memphis.

King concluded that, regardless, the BOP group would definitely have to be recognized by the Negro leadership in Memphis.

As an aftermath of this meeting, [redacted] several of the BOP people were drinking a highly alcoholic content cough medicine and getting drunk on it and that James Phillips, the individual

previously referred to as Phil, got into a highly emotional argument with John Burrell Smith and actually broke down and cried. This group indicated that they obtained something similar to marijuana or some sort of intoxicant from a Beale Street character named Jiggs. They did not elaborate.

[redacted] commented on the mass meeting on the night of April 3, 1968, at which King and Ralph D. Abernathy spoke, adding that in addition to their speeches that Reverend James Morris Lawson, Jr., spoke, giving an emotional speech concerning the police shooting of a 17-year-old male Negro named Larry Payne during the March 28, 1968, rioting and looting in Memphis. Lawson stated that this was police brutality at its worst and was a continuation of brutality as "we, the black people" have known for a long, long time. Lawson stated that neither Mace, snow nor the new injunction would stop any future marches.

Also speaking was Reverend Malcolm Douglas Blackburn, pastor of the Clayborn Temple, in which speech he compared the Memphis marches with Jericho of Biblical times and stated that "We'll march until the walls of Memphis crumble."

Later on April 4, 1968, a second source advised that Dorothy Cotton of the SCLC staff had left Memphis at 11:20 a.m., via Eastern Airlines en route to Atlanta, Georgia. This source later stated that at 4:30 p.m., April 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph D. Abernathy and Andrew J. Young had made arrangements to fly to Atlanta, Georgia, one way, with no return reservations being made, to leave Memphis at 7 a.m., April 5, 1968, aboard Eastern Airlines Flight 384, due to arrive at Atlanta at 9:03 a.m., EST.

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At about 6:07 p.m., April 4, 1968, Lieutenant E. H. Arkin, Memphis Police Department, advised that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., had been shot by an unknown assailant as he was standing in front of the Lorraine Hotel, 406 Mulberry Street, Memphis, Tennessee.

Later on the evening of April 4, 1968, Captain Jewell G. Ray, Inspectional Bureau, Memphis Police Department, advised that the Memphis Police Department had determined from preliminary investigation that the shot which felled Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., had been fired from an upstairs window at a cheap rooming house or "flop" house at 422½ South Main Street, the rear windows of which would overlook an open lot giving a direct view to the front of the Lorraine Hotel, and that a .30 caliber automatic rifle and a cardboard box, a blue suitcase and box of .30 caliber shells had been found in the immediate vicinity of the flop house. Captain Ray also stated that the assailant, a white male, who had registered in the flop house earlier on April 4, 1968, as one John Willard, giving no address, had allegedly fled on foot and was possibly seen jumping into a white Mustang or similar white car.

On the evening of April 4, 1968, Steve McCall, 111th Military Intelligence Corps, Third Army, Memphis, advised that the Governor of Tennessee, Buford Ellington, had ordered the Tennessee National Guard to immediate duty in Memphis, Tennessee, and that approximately 3,400 Guardsmen were en route, all coming from West Tennessee Guard units and that two units from Middle Tennessee were being flown to Memphis. He stated that the Guard would be quartered at Armour Station, a substation of the Memphis Police Department, at the Memphis Fairgrounds, and at the Tennessee Air National Guard installation, at the Memphis Municipal Airport.

Later on the night of April 4, 1968, Captain Ray and Lieutenant E. H. Arkin and Lieutenant George Feathers, all of the Inspectional Bureau of the Memphis Police Department, advised that a curfew had been placed into effect; that all restaurants and public amusement places had been closed; and that sporadic burnings and lootings

were taking place, particularly in the Negro areas of Memphis, primarily involving liquor stores and sundry stores, and that a large fire had been placed at a lumber yard off North Second Street. They pointed out that some officers had been shot at by unidentified snipers, but that as of midnight the situation was reasonably in hand although the fire department, in answering some calls, had been bombarded by bottles and rocks and in those instances where the police could not release sufficient personnel to guard them, the fire department called its men back and allowed the fires to burn. They stated that the only real serious fire that he knew of was the lumber yard fire in North Memphis.

Lieutenant Arkin stated on April 4, 1968, that during the day of April 4, 1968, hearings had been held in the Court of Judge Bailey Brown on the part of attorneys representing the SCLC and the City of Memphis to determine whether or not Judge Brown should withdraw his temporary restraining order on future marches or should modify it. As of the close of the Court's business day, Judge Brown announced that he would hold in abeyance his decision and would give it on the morning of April 5, 1968.

The information obtained during April 4, 1968, was furnished to representatives of the 111th Military Intelligence Corps, Third Army, Memphis, Tennessee, as well as to representatives of the Inspectional Bureau, Memphis Police Department.

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Character: RACIAL MATTERS

Reference: Memorandum prepared at Memphis, Tennessee, dated and captioned as above.

All sources (except any listed below) whose identities are concealed in referenced communication have furnished reliable information in the past.

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